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U.S. Shrugs Off Soviet Reaction To Hints of Wider Vietnam War

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 26—A statement from Moscow and the resignation of Roger Hilsman Jr. as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs have intruded upon, but not deflected, the Administration's reappraisal of policy in Vietnam.

The Soviet comment about the guerilla war in South Vietnam was read here as a mild and predictable first response to Washington's well-advertised hints that the war may be carried into the Communist territory of North Vietnam. The Administration will keep dropping such hints while it weighs the risk of further action.

The resignation of Mr. Hilsman gave many the impression that it resulted from a major policy dispute, but it appears to have been prompted more by personal considerations. Mr. Hilsman was said to have been troubled more by his loss of influence than by the loss of any particular argument.

Officially, the Administration said nothing about either development.

A decision about future policy in Vietnam is believed to be at least several weeks away. Much will depend upon the report of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, who will visit Saigon next week, and upon the recommendations of the United States Ambassador there, Henry Cabot Lodge.

The war is now acknowledged to be going poorly. The major questions turn on the military and political effectiveness of Saigon's new Government, headed by Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh.

In the meantime, policy recommendations and statements here will be fed through an interagency committee headed by William H. Sullivan, another Far East expert at the State Department. His name figures prominently in the speculation about Mr. Hilsman's successor.

The Soviet Union's statement on Vietnam, an "authorized" comment by Tass, the Soviet Press agency, did not particularly disturb Washington. It was viewed here primarily as confirmation that Moscow would feel compelled to respond to Washington's recent attempts at psychological warfare.

The Administration has let it be known that it is again considering the organization of raids by South Vietnamese forces against North Vietnamese installations. It hopes in this way to encourage moderates in Moscow and in Hanoi, who are known to have been warning against excessive provocation of the United States. No one here expected the Soviet, Chinese and North Vietnamese Communists to make their disputes even more public than they have been. Moscow's statement, in any case, was considered as restrained as possible under the circumstances.

The statement referred to Hanoi's warnings against an extension of the war to North Vietnamese territory. It expressed the support of the Government and people of the Soviet Union for the "just demands" of the rebels in South Vietnam. It said the people of the Soviet Union could not remain indifferent to indications of stepped-up conflict.

Moscow itself never referred directly to North Vietnam. It did not specify the kind of support it might render.

The indications here were that Washington would continue to encourage warnings that it might have to undercut the system by which North Vietnam has supported attacks in the south but kept its own territory beyond reach.